

STATE SENATOR • BURTON LELAND • 5TH DISTRICT

Leland Press Release

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SEN. LELAND RESPONDS TO REPUBLICAN BOTTLE BILL TASK FORCE REPORT

The following is a statement made by Sen. Burton Leland (D-Detroit) on the floor of the Senate today:

“I rise today to respond to the report released this morning by the Beverage Container and Recycling Task Force. It is my understanding, from my quick review of their report that they have come to the conclusion that expanding Michigan’s bottle bill still requires more discussion. I have to tell you that although I am very disappointed by these findings, I am not surprised. This task force spent six months, and who knows how much money, to duck the most important and widely supported initiative – expansion of the bottle bill.

Don’t get me wrong. I wholeheartedly agree that increasing our recycling efforts is a worthy endeavor. In fact, many of my colleagues and I have worked hard over the years to improve our state’s recycling initiatives. However, increasing recycling absent of a bottle bill expansion does nothing for urban communities like mine. Curbside and drop-off recycling programs are designed for residential, suburban areas. As we learned when we first implemented the bottle bill in the late 1970’s, refundable deposit programs work in every community. That’s why Senator Switalski and I introduced bills earlier this year to add more containers to Michigan’s bottle deposit program.

Here’s something I’m curious about. I’m wondering who the task force members talked to during their nine meetings around the state. It appears to me that there’s a large percentage of the state’s population they neglected to talk to. This would be the 70% of Michigan residents who support an expansion of the bottle bill. I know that my constituents support it. Come down to my district and you’ll see why. The empty water and juice and iced tea bottles that litter the streets and highways and parks in our communities are a nuisance and an eyesore. These types of beverages now make up 20% of all beverage sales in the country. However, since these containers are currently not included in the bottle deposit program in Michigan, they are the ones strewn about our streets and yards and taking up space in our landfills.

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A little history lesson might be useful here. Michigan was the first industrial state to implement a bottle bill in the late 1970's. The reasons for the original legislation – to reduce litter, improve the environment, and conserve natural resource – are still important today. We should always be looking for opportunities to improve and respond to the changes in the beverage industry and our own consumption habits. The legislature did this in 1988 when it expanded the bottle bill to include wine coolers and canned cocktails. It's time to make another change.

If we truly want to increase recycling, expansion of the bottle bill is a proven way to do so. In Michigan, over 95% of refundable containers are recycled. About 10 years after the bottle bill was originally implemented, the Department of Transportation reported that bottle and can litter was reduced by 80% because people had a financial incentive to return them instead of tossing them out the car window. If we expand the bottle bill to include non-carbonated beverage containers, it is estimated that an additional 800 million containers would be added to the system. Not only would this clean up our streets and highways, it would help decrease our dependence on landfills. As of 2000, Americans trashed more than 100 Billion, that's Billion with a B, beverage containers. The bottle bill is the most effective way to recycle bottles and cans and prevent litter.

As I mentioned earlier, we have a couple of bills ready to go over here if my colleagues from the task force want to get serious about recycling and do what a vast majority of our residents have said they want – expansion of the bottle bill.”

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